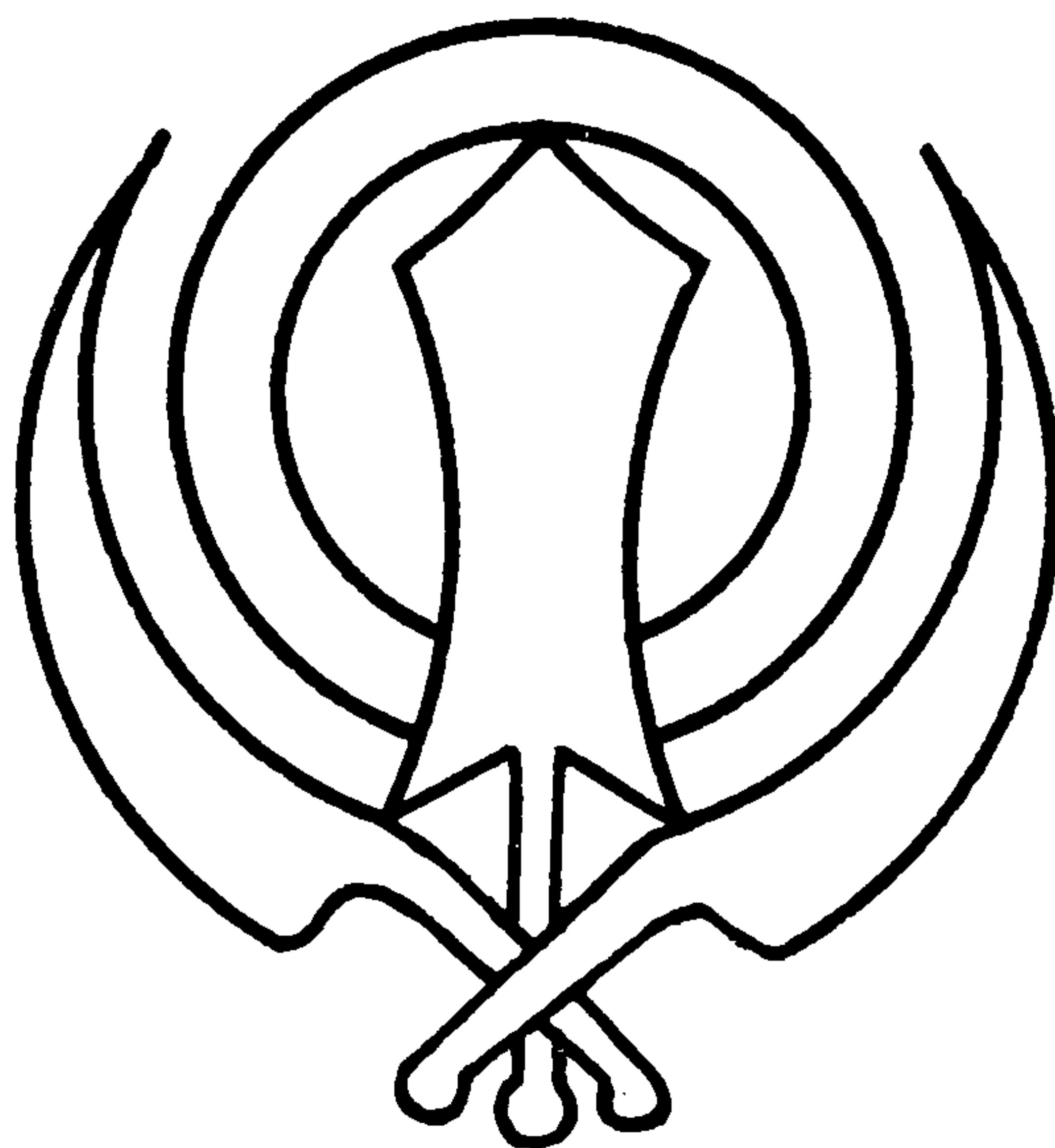


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GURU NANAK

WORLD TEACHER



GOBIND SINGH MANSUKHANI

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GURU NANAK

WORLD TEACHER

BY

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FOREWORD

Guru Nanak was one of the greatest religious teachers the world has seen. His emphasis on the fundamental principles common to all religions has helped to build up a tradition of cultural unity and religious toleration in India and abroad. Guru Nanak believed that man could attain the supreme good in life if he followed in a spirit of sincerity and Charity the best teaching which was available in his environment. The truth is approachable by diverse paths and therefore Guru Nanak did not insist upon or inculcate a particular creed, which must be accepted by all. For him the different religions were like different languages.

The depth of a religion lies in its spirit and not in external ceremonies, without conviction in the mind or love in the heart. He infused life into the benumbed limbs of faith which had been paralysed by outmoded beliefs, bigotry and superstitions. Guru Nanak's method was direct and simple. He spoke in words that touched the hearts of all peoples. The religion favoured and preached by Guru Nanak is the religion of man, free from the narrow sectarian point of view, dogma and prejudice. The doctrine of exclusive salvation and the idea of a chosen people are alien to his message of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. His gospel is therefore cosmopolitan in its outlook and universal in its appeal. He was not seeking to create a new order of faith distinct from the prevalent religious fabric yet his teaching was the sure foundation upon which his nine successors built and upon which modern Sikhism still stands.

The following article by Dr. Gobind Singh Mansukhani will enable the reader to discover for himself not only the historical traditions of Sikhism but also that it is a living faith which has an important message not only for its Indian adherents but for all mankind.

PIARA SINGH SAMBHI
President
The Sikh Temple, LEEDS

16 SHOLEBROKE PLACE
LEEDS 7
October 1st 1969



S. Daljit Singh Sond, G.Sec. Sikh Temple, Leeds, Dr. G.S.Mansukhani, Mr. W. Owen Cole, Head of the Religious Studies Dept. and Mr. P.S. Sambhi, President, The Sikh Temple, Leeds, with the students of the James Graham College of Education, Leeds.



Students of James Graham College of Education, Leeds, listening to a lecture by Dr. G. S. Mansukhani during his visit on the eve of the 500th Anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak.

GURU NANAK

World Teacher

by

Dr Gobind Singh Mansukhani

I have come to the world in search of Truth.

(Guru Nanak)

India in the middle ages was much disturbed by political strife and religious fanaticism and persecution. The Muslim rulers were fanatical and bigoted. Even saints and sadhus were not free from harassment. Namdev was ordered on pain of death by the then ruler to bring back to life a dead cow. Similarly Kabir was thrown before a mad elephant during the time of Sikandar Lodi. Religious persecution was also practised by the high caste Brahmins. Namdev, the cobbler was expelled from the temple of Lord Krishna. In a caste-ridden society, the Brahmins and the priests completely neglected the religious requirements of the common man. The religious leaders were hypocritical and narrow-minded. They traded on the superstition and ignorance of the masses. Outwardly they rigidly observed the time-honoured rites and ceremonies, but they neglected the spirit and the consolations which spirituality alone could provide. By and large, they had no inner light; their conscience was stifled by greed, lust and corrupt practices. They had become selfish, cruel and hypocritical. Some brahmins ate the forbidden mutton and yet never allowed any one to enter their cooking squares for fear of pollution. The ruling classes were equally pretentious:

Those who devour men, yet read the Namaz,

Those who ply the dagger have sacred strings on their neck.

Guru Nanak was pained to see such deterioration among the Hindus, who sold themselves to secure personal advantages. He says: "The *khatris* turned away from their true vocation — the military profession — and used the tongue of their foreign masters".¹ As Guru Nanak scanned the scene, he remarked:

*Truth is scarce and falsehood is popular;
The darkness of the age has made demons of men...
Sin is the king, greed the minister,
Falsehood the mint-master and lust its deputy;
They sit and confer together.*²

Sardar Khazan Singh has summed up the conditions prevailing then in India thus: "Corruption, degradation and treachery stalked openly through the land. Murders and robberies were the order of the day."³ Religious degeneration was wide-spread. According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu leaders neglected to teach the spiritual relations to the people at large who were sunk in superstition and materialism. Religion became confused with caste distinction and taboos about eating and drinking. The Muslims were also victims of superstition and some of their leaders were afflicted with the disease of intolerance."⁴ The impact of Islam on India produced unhappy results. It really meant a terrible setback to Hindu religion, culture and society. As stated by Dr. Tara Chand, "The Muslims upset everything, the Hindu religion received a terrible blow, the patronage of the priests and Pandits ceased, the Hindu monuments were destroyed, literature received no royal encouragement and languished; to all outward appearance, political conquest was synonymous with cultural death."⁵

The Hindus were, on the other hand, addicted merely to formalism. The Hindu priests were engaged in the worship of external forms, little realising that religion was not ritualism but purposeful living. Guru Nanak writes:

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1. Adi Granth : P. 663
 2. Adi Granth : P. 468
 3. Khazan Singh : History and Philosophy of the Sikhs : P. 394
 4. UNESCO : Sacred writings of the Sikhs : P. 18
 5. Tara Chand : "Influence of Islam on Hindu Culture" : (Introduction)

*“Pandits are busy studying Puranas,
Yogis are busy in yogic meditations,
Sanyasis are intoxicated with ego,
Tapasvis are intoxicated with secrets of Tapas
All are intoxicated, none is awake,
While thieves are robbing them.”*¹.

Guru Nanak observed the moral degradation of self-styled leaders of religion. Muslims had also suffered degeneration; isolated totally from the Hindus they had become fanatics and were attacking aggressively the other faiths.

The conduct of the so-called men of religion produced disgust in the minds of laity and turned them away from the higher and nobler tenets of their religions. They found refuge in renouncing the sin-ridden world and shirked their responsibilities as citizens.

The period in which Guru Nanak lived was that of transition from the medieval to the modern age. It was an age of inquiry and mental ferment all over the world. Martin Luther in Germany was giving a new interpretation of christianity, Copernicus was voyaging through the heavens and Columbus was about to discover America. The mind of man was exploring new ideas and fields and extending the horizons of man's knowledge.

It was in 1469 that Guru Nanak was born at Talwandi. The seventy years of his life could be divided into three periods. The first 28 years he lived as a householder; he utilised the next 24 years in travel and expounding his mission, and the last 18 years of his life he spent as a farmer and inspirer of his followers at Kartarpur. At an early age, Nanak showed great interest in spiritual matters and talked of God and His mysteries. He had an inquiring mind. He put questions to Brahmins, Pandits, Maulvis and the Yogis. He held several discourses with wandering *fakirs* and *sadhus*. This broadened his vision and his knowledge of other religions and he began to formulate his own views on religion and the means of attaining the truth: self realisation.

1. Adi Granth : P. 64

As a boy, Guru Nanak collected his friends, and spoke to them of the wonders of the universe and the greatness of God. When he was taken to the village Pandit, he questioned the teacher about the significance of each letter of the alphabet. He expounded to him his own ideas in an acrostic: *Patti*. At the age of nine, he was asked to wear the traditional sacred thread which he refused to do. He asked the Pandit to make such a sacred thread which would stand the test of time and remain unsullied for ever. He said:

*From mercy as cotton, spin threads of contentment,
And give it a twist of righteousness and tie on it the
knot of continence;*

*Such is the sacred thread of the Soul,
If you have such a thread, O Pandit, you may put it on
my neck.*

*It will neither break nor get soiled, nor would it get
burnt nor lost,*

*Says Nanak, a person who wears such a sacred thread
Is really great and worthy of respect and praise.¹*

The Pandit was wonder-struck and he confessed that he was unable to make or find such a sacred thread.

There are quite a few such incidents in his early life which are narrated in old biographies (*Janam-Sakhis*) of Guru Nanak. All of them illustrate the fact that he was not interested in worldly pursuits or in money-making. He acquired the knowledge of God through communion with nature and illumination from within. His mind was filled with truth and wisdom. His father — Mehta Kalu — wanted his son to take up business as his profession. He sent him with twenty rupees to purchase merchandise as his stock-in-trade, to be sold in due course at a profit. With Bala as his companion, Guru Nanak set out to make a good bargain. On the way, he met a party of *Sadhus* who were hungry and in urgent need of food. In spite of disuasion of his companion, he decided to invest the money in what he considered the most profitable bargain of feeding the

1. Adi Granth : P. 471

hungry holy men. He was sure that such a perfect investment would yield rich dividends in God's realm. So he went to the neighbouring town to purchase the food-stuffs and fed the hungry *Sadhus*. The father, on the return of his son empty-handed, got very angry and was greatly disappointed that his son could not make the successful career of a business-man. He decided to get service for his son and sent him to his brother-in-law at Sultanpur where Nanak was employed by the Nawab as a store-keeper. His duty was to weigh and to supply food-stuffs to the army as well as to the poor and needy persons. In course of weighing and counting, when he came to the number 13 — *tera* — he went on weighing but continued to repeat *tera* — “I am thine, O Lord” — absorbed in deep meditation and forgetting the count. He thus gave liberally to the poor.

When Guru Nanak went home he was lost in God's meditation and did not show any interest in worldly things. His trances were often long and exhausting which gave the impression that he was not in good health. A physician was called who enquired from Guru Nanak about his trouble or ailment. Guru Nanak replied that in his inmost heart there was the seat of trouble — as if a knife was hurting him from inside. How could such a pain be cured by the physician? The Name of the Lord and union with God for which he yearned could alone afford him real comfort.

To divert his mind towards worldly pursuits, Guru Nanak's father arranged his marriage. He was married in 1487 to Sulakhni, the daughter of Moola, resident of Batala. Sri Chand was the first son born to Sulakhni. On the thirteenth day after Sri Chand's birth, Guru Nanak found that certain preparations were being made to purify the kitchen and the house which was supposed to have been rendered impure by the child's birth. Guru Nanak regarded birth as a normal event and did not consider that there was anything impure about it. Birth and death are

natural phenomena and a part of God's order and they do not cause any pollution. Guru Nanak said:

*The real Satak (impurity) is the covetous mind
Tongue speaking untruths, eyes full of lust
And ears accepting unreliable evidence as true,
Real impurity is the leperous infection of the mind.*

In 1497, when Nanak was just 28, he received the Divine call. He disappeared in the Veine (the nearby stream) leaving his clothes on the bank. When he came out and people gathered round him, he told them that there was no Hindu and no Muslim and that he was henceforth to carry out the mission assigned to him by God:

“The Lord called me — a bard of no consequence — to His service. Day and night I am at His beck and call, always ready to follow His will. The Master called His bard in His presence and there the bard received the Robe of Honour to sing the true praises of the Lord. Now the Nectar of the Name has become my daily food. The bard has to sing the Word and propagate His mission. Says Nanak, the perfect Lord is revealed to those who praise the True One”.¹

Donning the garb of a *fakir*, Guru Nanak set out in 1497 on his first missionary tour — *yatra* — which lasted for 12 years. As he entered Eminabad, he saw a carpenter mending wooden pegs. He called out to him: “Surely, life is meant for something better than mending wooden pegs”.² Lalo, the carpenter, thus had his spiritual awakening and he became the first follower of Guru Nanak. Thereafter Guru Nanak proceeded to Tulumba near Multan. Here he came across Sajjan Thug, masquerading as a social worker and a holy man. Guru Nanak soothed his mind with music and made him awake to the reality and the foulness of what he had been doing and as to how near he was to his doom:

*Bronze is bright and shining
But when rubbed, blackness comes from it.*³

Sajjan asked for forgiveness and turned over a new leaf

1. Adi Granth : P. 148

2. T. L. Vaswani : A Prophet of the people : P. 65

3. Adi Granth : P. 729

in his life. The criminal's den became a temple of God and His worship.

On his way to Dipalpur, Guru Nanak visited a leper living in a hut in the wilderness. The leper was surprised at this midnight visitor, because people shunned his company. Guru Nanak sat down near him and sang:

All sufferings are the fruit of man's indifference to God,

Those who forget the Lord are like lepers,

Who scream aloud in pain and sufferings . . .

If through His Grace, a man begins to meditate on Him,

And exerts himself in the path of love and service,

He shall assuredly be saved,

Though he be the dirtiest leper;

He bestows His gifts on all.

The leper took the Guru's advice to heart and began a life of meditation. The service of lepers was dear to Guru Nanak's heart, and his Sikhs should establish in his honoured memory homes for the lepers.

At Hardwar, Guru Nanak in his characteristic manner, taught the Hindu pilgrims the futility of their throwing handfuls of water, expecting that the water would reach their ancestors in the other world. He quietly entered the river and began to throw water similarly but in the reverse direction — towards his fields in the west. The pilgrims thought him crazy and asked why he was throwing water to the west. His answer was that he was irrigating the newly-sown crop in his fields. "How far are they situated?" "Only about 200 miles away," he replied. "How can your handfuls of water reach so far?" Guru Nanak then asked a counter-question: "How far are your ancestors?" "Millions of miles away in the next world," was the quick reply. He then told them to note this simple fact. He asked them if his handfuls of water could not reach 200 miles, how could their handfuls of water offered

as libations to their ancestors, reach them. He thus exposed the practice invented by the Brahmins to deceive the pilgrims and in a practical manner demonstrated the futility of their superstitious action.

In Rohilkhand, an Afghan chief captured Guru Nanak and sold him as a slave. The Guru told the Mir: "You have forged chains for your-self by selling men to slavery. How will you show your face in the court of God?" The Afghan realized the truth of the remark and at once set the slaves at liberty and himself became a true devotee of the Guru.

In Assam, Guru Nanak came across to a beautiful sorceress who tried all her charms on him but without success. The Guru told her: "Be a queen of mercy and not of magic. Fulfil the divine mission of sowing in the hearts of boys and girls the seed of virtue and teach them by your own example and life that courage and truth are rooted in their being. No word of religion is ever understood but through a virtuous deed".¹

During his second missionary tour (1510–1515), Guru Nanak proceeded to South India and Ceylon. Wherever he went, he preached the need of purity of thought and action. It is not eating or drinking which is of consequence — what matters is the manner in which we live. He did not believe in austerities. He was for plain living and high thinking. He told his Sikhs: "Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world". The secret of a righteous life is purity of thought, word and deed.

Raja Shiv Nabh of Sangladwip (Ceylon) learnt of Guru Nanak from Bhagirath. He waited patiently for the visit of the Guru. At last Guru Nanak came and revealed to the Raja the secrets of the soul: "The soul comes from the Eternal and eventually returns to the Eternal. Attachment is the bondage. By righteous living, the bondage is loosened. By exalting the Lord's name, the sacred word enters the heart like nectar, leaving no room for the darkness of desire; the human soul then becomes one with God".²

1. Joginder Singh & Daljit Singh : Guru Nanak: P. 97

2. Joginder Singh & Daljit Singh : Guru Nanak: P. 107

Guru Nanak's third tour (1516–1518) took him to the northern region. Here he held a long discussion with the Sidhs of Mansarovar. The Guru reprimanded them for neglecting the laity and living in their ivory towers. Asceticism or isolation is an unhealthy escape from life. True religion teaches us to face the problems of life and society. The Guru revealed to them the secret of true yoga.

Guru Nanak began his fourth tour in 1518 towards the west and in good time reached Mecca. Attired in the dress of a Muslim he slept at night, little knowing that his feet pointed in the direction of the holy place — *Kaaba*. When questioned about this act of disrespect to the *Kaaba*, he requested the care-taker, Jiwan, to turn his feet in the direction where God was not. Then began the great debate with the Maulvis of Mecca. "Who is better: a Hindu or a Muslim?" With great humility Guru Nanak replied, "God reads hearts and not labels. Both Hindus and Muslims will be expelled from God's court if they have not done noble actions; God judges people by deeds and not by creeds."¹ Religion is life, not theology. This was an eyeopener for the orthodox Muslims who till now had believed that Islam was the best religion in the world.

On his way back, Guru Nanak visited Baghdad in 1520. This was the homeland of Islam. Guru Nanak stayed here for four months and held spiritual discussions with fakir Bahlol. Guru Nanak explained to Bahlol the significance of sacred music — *Kirtan* — and the wonders and expanse of the universe.² There is a memorial erected at the spot — "Here spake the Hindu Guru Nanak to faqir Bahlol and for these 60 years, since the Guru left Iran, the soul of Bahlol has rested on the Master's word — like a bee poised on a dawnlit honey-rose"³

Guru Nanak travelled through Sind and visited the temple of Durga at Hinglaj, nine miles from Thatta.⁴ This was a centre of the touch-me-not sect (*Aparash*). They followed the traditional austerities. Guru Nanak spoke to them of the inner purity:

1. Bhai Gurdas : Var I. 33

2. Ibid. Var I. 36

3. Kartar Singh : Life of Guru Nanak Dev. P. 215

4. Meharban Sodhi : Janam Sakhi (Punjabi) P. 461

*Speaking the Truth is real fast,
 Remaining contented is true pilgrimage,
 Meditation is the true bath,
 Compassion is the true worship,
 Humility is the real rosary,
 Discipline is the clean Dhoti,
 Concentration is the consecrated kitchen-square
 Righteous living is the Tilak,
 Love is the satisfying food,
 Such a person is rare indeed.¹*

As Guru Nanak returned to the Punjab in 1521, he found Babar's hordes attacking cities and villages. He hastened to Eminabad, also called Saidpur, to meet Bhai Lalo and share the woes and the miseries of the down-trodden Indians. Twenty-four years earlier, during his first visit to Lalo in 1497, Guru Nanak had predicted the invasion of Babar. The Guru had told Lalo that a greater catastrophe than the reign of terror of the Lodhi rulers was to visit the Punjab. Guru Nanak then had sung a moving song of lamentation:

*As the Word of the Lord comes to me,
 Even so do I make it known to thee, O, Lalo,
 With a mighty host will he hasten hither from Kabul,
 Like a bridegroom with a sinful crowd as bridal
 procession,
 With brutal force will he snatch India's wealth as his
 bride,
 Woe and misery will disfigure this unfortunate land.
 Modesty, honour and righteousness will all vanish.
 Evil and open vice will hold its sway, O, dear Lalo . .
 Just is the Lord, true is His verdict, true the Justice,
 That he meteth out to his all according to their Karma.
 Nanak hath spoken the word of the True Lord now.
 And will proclaim the rest at the time of occurrence."²*

Bhai Lalo had then pleaded with Nanak to avert the impending catastrophe but the Guru refused to interfere with God's will. The Lodi rulers had not cared for the jewel of India and had invited their own ruin. God's will must prevail.

1. Adi Granth : P. 1245

2. Ibid : P. 722

This was Babar's third attack on India (1521) with the armies of Islam bent on holy war. The rulers of the Punjab decided to resist the invader. Their outmoded weapons were no match for Babar's matchlocks. Eminabad was plundered and given to rape and ruin.

Mir Khan, the Commanding Officer, captured Guru Nanak and Mardana. He asked the Guru to carry a load on his head and ordered Mardana to act as a groom for his horse.¹ Guru Nanak poured out his heart in deep anguish:

How strange is thy dispensation, O Lord!

How incomprehensible are thy ways!

All is death and confusion now.

All happens as it pleases Him, O Nanak,

How can man resist His will?²

Mir Khan gave the Guru and Mardana a handmill each to grind the grain. The Guru sang a song which bewitched the heart of Mian Khan. The Khan requested emperor Babar to visit Guru Nanak in the prisoner's camp. When Babar came, Guru Nanak told him that though the emperor thought of himself as a mighty warrior, he was inferior even to a fly. The emperor was amazed at this remark. Mardana was grinding the corn, one hand placed over the wooden handle and the other dropping grain in the millhole. Flies were flitting on Mardana's face with the result that he had to leave the handle of the mill frequently and wave his right hand for keeping the flies away. Guru Nanak told Babar to order the flies to keep away from Mardana's face. Babar was confused. How could he order the flies to keep away? The Guru asked him that if he could not control flies, how could he rule over men. It is man's duty to serve and not lord over his fellowmen. Babar realised his own insignificance. He admitted his mistake in imprisoning holy men. Guru Nanak told Babar to take a warning from those whom he had defeated. They who ruled here yesterday were now rolling in the dust.

Where are those houses and those mansions?

Where are those beautiful seraglios?³

1. Kartar Singh : Life of Guru Nanak. : P. 224

2. Adi Granth : P. 417

3. Adi Granth : P. 417

Babar told Guru Nanak to embrace Islam and to accept prophet Mohamad as his guide.¹ The Guru replied that there were thousands of Mohamads waiting at God's door. He owed allegiance only to God who is the Sovereign Lord. Babar requested Nanak to ask for a boon. The Guru replied that God alone is the Giver. One who begs from the emperor is a fool. Babar said that if the Guru did not ask a boon, he in turn would request for a boon. The emperor said: "Give me the throne of Delhi for ever."² The Guru told him that nothing was permanent and his rule would last as long as he and his successors were just and generous. Once again Babar pressed the Guru to accept an offering from him. The Guru wanted nothing, but in order to relieve distress of the innocent prisoners, he told Babar to release the captives and to restore to them their property. Babar complied with the Guru's wishes. The prisoners on their release found that they had lost everything. The Guru applied to them the balm of sympathy. All joy and sorrow came from God. So, in the acceptance of the will of God, lay the glory of man.

Guru Nanak returned to Lalo's house. On the way, he saw hundreds of corpses lying in the streets. His heart was touched and he broke down into a song of compassion. In deep anguish Guru Nanak cried out to the Almighty:

*Thou hast sent Death disguised as the Mughal,
Terrible has been the suffering of thy poor,
Helpless people, O Lord of pity!
So terrible that they all cried aloud in deep agony.
Didst Thou feel no pang or pity at all, my God?
Thou belongest equally to all, O Creator.
Thou must equally feel for all.
If a strong man attacketh another who is equally
strong
One need feel no grief or anger:
But when lions and hungry wolves are let loose,
As now on herds of sheep and cattle,
The Master of the herd must be held responsible*

1. M. Macauliffe : The Sikh Religion, Vol. I : P. 121

2. Jogindar Singh & Daljit Singh : "Guru Nanak" : P. 64

*For the wanton and avoidable destruction.
The hounds of war have licked many a precious jewel
of life
How mysterious are thy ways, O Lord!*¹

With a parental and bleeding heart, Guru Nanak made an invocation to the Creator of the slayer and the slain. At the same time, by his wise counsel, he relieved the sufferings of the civilian population and told the people to lift up their voices to God and pray for His mercy.

What is the significance of *Babar-Vani*? Firstly, that pride and luxury must have a fall. The Lodhi rulers neglected the welfare of the country and the people under their charge. As such, they had to suffer the worst at the hands of the invader. Luxury and ease bring their own ruin:

*When the Lord wishes to destroy one
He first destroys one's virtues.*²

But why did the civilians suffer at the hands of Babar? The common people suffered because they tolerated the misrule of the Lodhis and offered no protest or resistance to their maladministration. Suffering is one of the instruments by which God secures the reform of the people. Guru Nanak stressed the need of heroic character and resistance to evil and affirmed the right of the people to rise in resistance against despotism. Slavery demoralises man and brings its own punishment through arson, rape and genocide. This is the re-assertion of the moral law which operates in the making of the history of nations. Degradation and destruction are the direct result of immorality, cowardice and the neglect of the higher values of life. Babar just served as a scourge of God for those who neglected the moral code.

Guru Nanak called a spade a spade and spared neither Babar — whom he called *Jabar*: a tyrant — nor the defeated Lodhi rulers whose reign was a by-word for licentiousness and tyranny. Guru Nanak vindicates the ways of God to man:

1. Adi Granth : P. 360

2. Ibid : P. 417

Nanak, in this carnage, wails and laments are heard all round,

*Blood flows in all directions, to serve for ritual saffron,
Just, however, is the Lord and fair is His doom. He is ever just.¹*

At the end, Guru Nanak lays down the inexorable moral law:

*Those who live in sin, their life's garment
Shall be torn to tatters and shreds,
Let India remember my words!²*

This lesson has been repeated in Indian history. Demoralisation initiated by foreign conquest debilitates the people and brings ruin and misery in its train. The betterment of society depends on the reform of individuals. Material progress is meaningless without a change in man's character and the improvement of the tone of society.

On the other hand, Guru Nanak considered seriously the state of Hindustan. India had become a hunting-ground for political opportunists. Rajas and Princes ruled according to their whims. Guru Nanak did not recognise the Divine right of kings or hereditary office. For him, a king should have the qualities of a ruler. He writes, "He alone should sit on the throne who is fit to rule". Ultimate sovereignty vested in the people. He loved the common man. His humanitarianism found an echo in the song of sympathy for the masses. He could not but grieve at humanity's bleeding and prostrate condition — the shame, the degradation and the helplessness of the masses. And yet out of the desperate situation, he wrenched an optimistic note:

*In '78 will Mughals come and in '97 depart,
Another, a disciple of a hero, will also rise in the land.³*

Guru Nanak spent the last eighteen years of life at Kartarpur. Here he organised a happy holy colony of village-folk and sang to them the hymns of the Lord. As a

1. Adi Granth : P. 722

2. Ibid : P. 722

3. Adi Granth : P. 722. According to historians, Guru Nanak's prediction proved true because Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah Suri and had to leave India in Samvat 1597 (1540 A.D.).

farmer-saint, he established the Temple of Bread so that no one may remain hungry. Here was an ideal village — community bound together by common aims and ideals: “Work and worship, love and labour, silence and song blended together in the life at Kartarpur.”¹

As the days of his life were coming to an end in 1539, Guru Nanak chose for his successor a true devotee and worker — Bhai Lahna. Guru Nanak sang the bridal song in the hour of his departure:

The blessed day hath dawned; the hour of wedding is come:

Come! Comrades, Come! Await the bride!

And the oil of your blessings pour on her:

For she, the bride, doth meet her Lord!

As he passed into God’s abode, his Hindu and Muslim devotees got ready to perform the funeral rites. When they removed the sheet under which Guru Nanak lay, they found fresh flowers on the bed-stead:

As water mingles in the water,

The light merges in the light.

It is very difficult to sum up Guru Nanak’s multiple achievements. His work had a lasting effect on his generation and the succeeding ones. Guru Nanak wanted to share his love and joy with the whole human family. He embraced a life of poverty to carry his message to different countries. He stressed the dignity of the common man and challenged tyranny and exploitation. He created a fraternity of God-conscious men ready for the service of the people. He spoke to men of different faiths in their respective languages. Near the end of his life, he established a spiritual and agricultural commonwealth where every one worked and prayed.

Guru Nanak was essentially a man of the masses. He sang of the people’s sufferings, of the wrongs done to his countrymen. He laid emphasis on the purity of character because without good actions, one cannot enter the realm

1. T. L. Vaswani : A Prophet of the People : P. 69

of spirituality. For him, God was a living reality and not an assumption. Practising the presence of God prevents man from indulging in evil propensities. Besides this, he gave a meaning and purpose to human life. According to him, the present life is an opportunity for entering the kingdom of God and escaping from the cycle of birth and death.

Moreover, Guru Nanak simplified religion. The mind is like a butter-fly flitting from one flower (pleasure) to another. It can be checked by concentration on the Name. That alone will give eternal joy and bliss. Guru Nanak insisted on sincerity and perseverance. He removed the hurdles between God and man: tradition, ritual, egoism, social taboos. He pleaded for the performance of charitable and noble deeds, because without purity and virtue, one cannot get a glimpse of Divinity.

Guru Nanak identified the seed; the seed must be preserved, the seed must grow. But we need a congenial soil. Bhai Lalo, Bhai Moola, Raja Shivrabh and Raja Duni Chand had already kept the mind ready for the Guru's word. It is the case of the lamp; the wick and the oil are there, what is needed is just a match-stick: the striking of the tinder. Those who are ready for the light make sincere efforts to enter the path of spirituality. Such men like clean vessels of milk are the hope of humanity. They may also be compared to catalytic agents to produce the much needed change in society by their example. Their practical life of meditation and service acts as a beacon-light for others.

Guru Nanak discovered the quintessence of religion in good and virtuous action. He tells us in the *Japji*:

*Words do not a saint or sinner make,
Action alone is written in the book of fate,
What we sow that alone we take,
O Nanak, be saved or for ever transmigrate.¹*

It is deeds which matter, not professions. Mere labels are of no avail.

1. Adi Granth : P. 3

*When a man wants to enter the fold of Hinduism,
 They put a thread of cotton round his neck
 But if after this investiture, he engages in evil deeds,
 His bath and purification will be of no avail.
 The Mohamadans praise their own creed.
 Without believing in the great Pir, none can enter
 God's Court,
 But few tread the path shown by the prophet.
 All will have to account for their deeds in His Court.
 Without good deeds, none will get salvation.
 Very few expound the truth of all truths
 Nanak, for them, there will be no questions hereafter.¹*

Guru Nanak's mission was not confined to India or Indians. He was a world-teacher and desired to reform the whole of mankind. He travelled extensively to Ceylon, Arabia, Iraq, Tibet and Afghanistan. His universal message of love, peace, service and Name was meant for the whole humanity. He specially visited places of pilgrimage and temples and monasteries of other faiths in order to show the absurdity of ritual and dogma. He reclaimed the worst of criminals — Bhumia the thief, Sajjan the thug, and Koda the cannibal. He brought about a change in their minds and made them realise the sickness of their souls. The result was that they themselves became anxious for getting rid of their sickness by the sovereign remedy of *Nam*.

Guru Nanak's life is a perfect example of the life a true Sikh should lead. As a trader, as a peasant, as a householder and as a devotee he lived up to the precepts he enunciated. He lived in the world and yet remained unattached to the things and events of daily life. His renunciation took the form of detachment, not deprivation. His house was open to all because it was the temple of bread.

Though Guru Nanak was not in agreement with the prevailing practices and beliefs of his contemporaries, he reformed them in a gentle but rational way. The means by

1. Adi Granth : P. 951

which he brought the erring souls to the right path were reason, humour, love and humility. Moreover, his divine music touched the chords of the hearts of his contemporaries. He made them mend their ways without any threat or force or even rebuke. The transition from the lower self to the higher self was brought about in a gentle and psychological manner. Such a change is more lasting and effective than a sudden shock induced under intimidation or compulsion. Look at this persuasive verse:

*Come, O Sisters, let us embrace as bosom-friends,
Let us relate our stories and experiences of the Omnipotent Bridegroom".¹*

The exchange of spiritual experiences was held between the Guru and his disciples in the ideal colony which he established at Kartarpur. All had to work and serve and pray together in this spiritual commonwealth.

Guru Nanak was a true cosmic personality. He found the world in straits and chaos and protested against the growing misrule of the princes and the priests. He mentioned without fear and favour, the difficulties of the common man, the crimes of the kings and the religious leaders, and appealed to the good sense of man to challenge such injustices and hardships. Guru Nanak stood for the rights of the common man and objected to his exploitation in any form. He rebuked the Lodhis for their misrule of the Punjab. Even emperor Babar confessed his mistake and promised to make amends for his cruelties. Guru Nanak had no armed might to back his demand for civil liberties and yet he moved the conscience of the official hierarchy to respect the dignity and honour of the citizens of India. He had the guts and courage to tell Babar that he was a cruel man in the same way in which Guru Gobind Singh later called Aurangzeb "a faithless tyrant." To call the princes butchers and expose the misdeeds of autocrats, bigots, robbers and slave-dealers called for superior resources of the heart and the spirit. Guru Nanak was once

1. Adi Granth : P. 17

stoned by the misguided bigots, but he did not mind it. The brave and the fearless are ready to die for the cause they espouse.

Guru Nanak was essentially a man of action. He disliked quietism and pacifism. He discouraged the *Udasi* views of his son — Sri Chand. The challenge of suffering and poverty has to be met by enlightened action. Besides, his mission of healing took the form of a gentle treatment of sickness rather than a drastic operation. Religion to him was essentially righteous action. While Islam believed in forcible conversion, Guru Nanak laid emphasis on the redemption of lost souls and on the diagnoses and fulfilment of the spiritual needs of each individual. Every man is unique and his spiritual condition is as different from that of another as his economic or social condition. Just as a wise physician would prescribe the right medicine for the patient, so Guru Nanak — the Spiritual Healer of the modern age, offered an individual and efficacious remedy for the misguided or the spiritually sick. Not that there was any lack of so-called religious people in India, but their religious practices had lost all meaning and brought about no transformation. Guru Nanak went deep into the history of sick souls and provided them the relief and the nourishment that they needed. Among his admirers were men of different faiths whom he had treated spiritually.

Even today — in this age of science and technology — his perennial teaching will restore man to health and balance. In this age of sham, cant and discord, how true ring his words:

*Make Truth the knife and Truth its steel,
Let it be sharpened on the whetstone of the Word,
And kept protected in the sheath of Virtue.*

The science of today may improve physical conditions and standards of the life of the common man, but what about his inner condition. Will he have peace and equanimity inside him? Will his conflicts — racial, economic political and social — vanish with the waving of

the wand of science? No, science may lead to human exploitation, racial arrogance and loss of human values. It is here that the immortal philosophy of Guru Nanak will stand in good stead. His message will humanise the scientist and make him realise his social responsibility. It will make him discharge his duty to humanity at large. The value of religion lies in making science serve the cause of peace and prosperity in the world. It creates a regard for moral and universal values. The dynamism of Guru Nanak's message will save the modern world from global annihilation and erosion of human values.

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